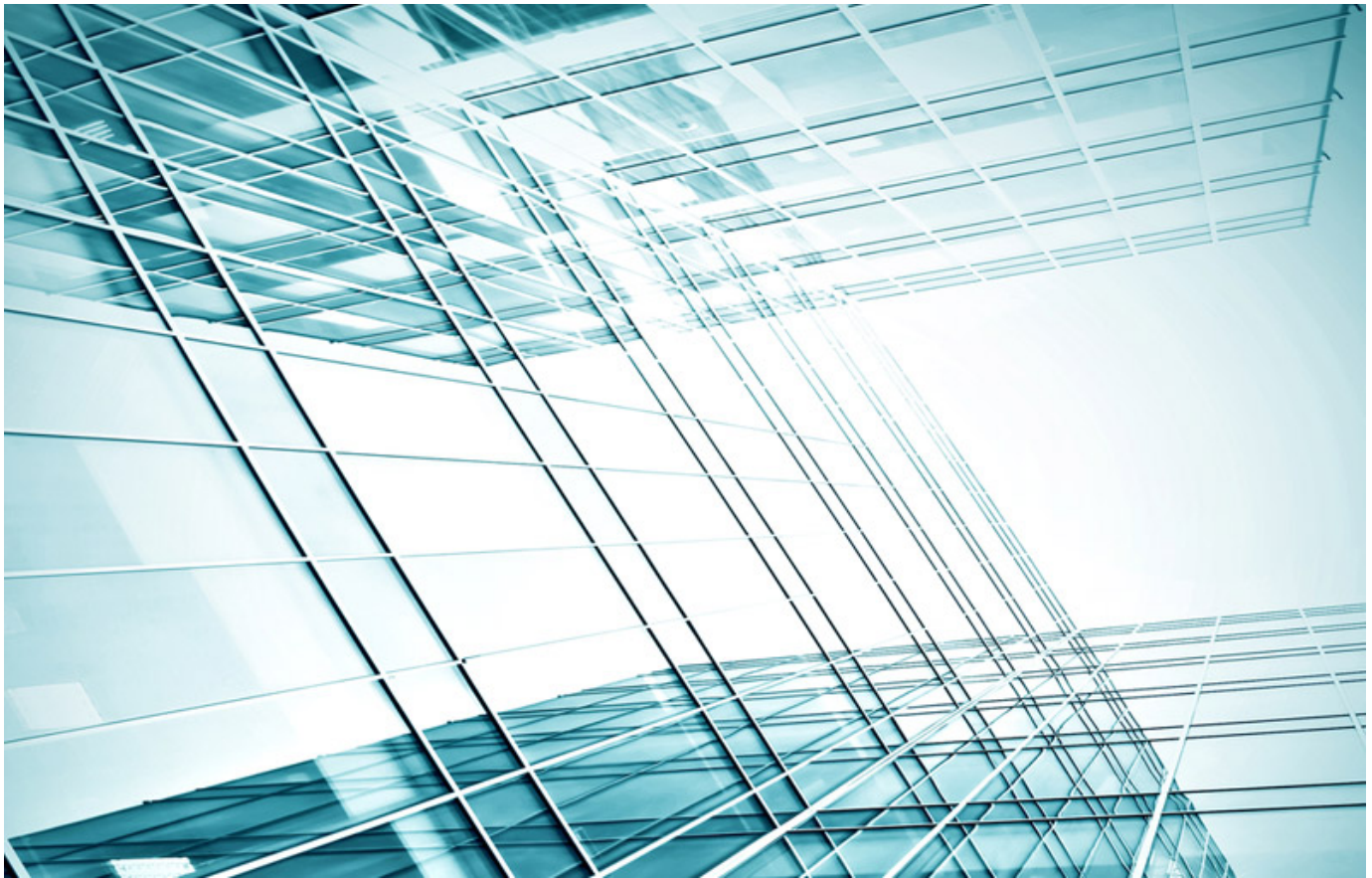


CPA Canada (/en)

Female leaders in accounting: Collette A. Miller

June 14, 2010

CPA Collette A. Miller shares the career path she took to become a leader in the accounting field.



- **Title:** Partner
- **Place of employment:** Wilde & Company Chartered Accountants, Vegreville, Alberta
- **Number of company employees:** 30
- **University:** 1982, Bachelor of Commerce; University of Alberta
- **Designation year:** 1986, Wilde & Company, Vegreville

When Colette Miller wrote the UFE at age 27 in 1986, she already had four children. In 2009, she received her FCA designation and was appointed to the Board of Directors at ATB Financial, the largest financial institution in Alberta.

“Life has become simpler, although not quieter, now that all of our children are finished university, married and starting families,” she says from her office at Wilde & Company Chartered Accountants in Vegreville, Alberta, about 100 kilometres east of Edmonton.

There had been thoughts of a law career, but with her aptitude for math and the early start on her family, Miller decided to join the family accounting firm of which her father, Jerry Wilde, had been a founding partner in 1962.

“Taking business at university seemed practical and only required 15 hours per week in class,” she says.

“Articling in a family business provided some flexibility with the children.”

She graduated in 1982, bought into the firm as a partner and soon took on the HR role, which she continues today. “We are transitioning some of these responsibilities,” she says, “but I stay involved with CASB and our student training.”

She is also senior audit partner at the firm, with a staff ranging from 25 to 33 in its town of 5,834 residents, conducts more municipal audits than any other in the province, and is responsible for updating the Municipal Audit course for the ICAA. Miller was on council for the ICAA for four years and was elected secretary-treasurer for a year. An incessant student, she has taken many of their courses, and now regularly instructs for them, as well as for the Elected Officials Education Program (EOEP).

Miller believes leadership is in her genes. “I am intrigued with the gifts people are born with,” she says, and admits her own front-running personality showed up early. “Throughout school, I ‘took charge.’ Others looked to me for guidance.”

She does believe the innate traits do need to be developed, and that environment, mentors, education and training play a big part. To that end, the firm brought in the Executive Leadership program from the University of Alberta a couple of years ago and is still using the concepts developed.

“This is important to our business succession,” she says.

One of the most outstanding characteristics in her opinion is communication. “That often involves more listening than talking.”

Among other keys to success are integrity, empathy — and fun. “Everyone knows when I’m in the office,” she says. “I have quite a loud laugh!”

Beyond the halls of daily duty and their grain-and-cattle farm, the Millers have travelled regularly as a family, and the 51-year-old grandmother of four practises meditation, tai chi and qigong, and likes horseback riding.

“Travel is an important aspect of education,” she says. She and her husband still make annual sojourns to Hawaii.

Miller has no plans of slowing down any time soon. She is enrolled in the Institute of Corporate Directors training program, and office hours may get scaled back when director positions on boards come up.

And, she would welcome more grandchildren. “I will be happy to meet any grandbaby that comes into our lives, and help my children the way my parents helped me.”

UPDATE 2013:

Miller is still partner at Wilde & Company, and remains on the Board at ATB Financial. She is into year three at AVAC Ltd., a private not-for-profit Calgary investment company, as director and chair on the Audit Committee, and has been chair of the ICAA Recognition Committee for two years.

At the end of February, she joined the board of Athabasca University. She has been involved with the Big Brothers, Big Sisters In-School Mentor program for five years and has recently been matched with her third “little brother.”

Away from work, she enjoys time with her eight grandchildren and outdoor activities on her farm. Hawaii is still an annual destination.